# Crush

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/467301.

**Rating:**
Explicit

**Archive Warning:**
Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

**Category:**
M/M

**Fandom:**
Everwood

**Relationship:**
Bright Abbott/Ephram Brown

**Characters:**
Bright Abbott, Ephram Brown

**Language:**
English

**Stats:**
Published: 2005-09-08 Words: 7,214 Chapters: 1/1

# Crush

by Zee (orphan_account)

Summary

Somehow, Bright knows it's all Amy's fault.

Bright knew, without a doubt, that somehow it was all Amy's fault.

Stupid Amy and her stupid pretty hair and her stupid tragic angst that somehow attracted guys to her like flies to honey.

Morons. Couldn't they see that underneath her clever facade of vulnerable, lost tragic beauty lied the soul of a manipulative witch who lived to make Bright's life miserable?

Which she did. She really, really did, because if it weren't for Amy he wouldn't have to deal with Ephram Brown.

If it weren't for Amy deciding that she wanted to try out her mind games on Ephram, Bright would never have given him a second look, never paid any attention to him aside from noticing that he sucked at basketball in gym. But Amy had to be contrary, had to go and attach herself at the hip to the guy, and Bright told himself he was pissed on Colin's behalf.

He thought it would stop after he and the new guy tousled in the snow and Amy gave him a shiner, but he'd underestimated her stubbornness. No matter what Bright said or did to either of them—he even *tried* to warn Ephram of Amy's fickleness, but Ephram didn't listen, of course—she still led him on and he still trailed after like a lost puppy. It made Bright a little nauseous.

Predictably, Amy dropped Ephram like a hot coal when Colin came back. Bright wanted to say 'I told you so' and rub Ephram's face in it, but he didn't, and told himself that it was because he was too busy with Colin. He wasn't being nice or anything.

He didn't think he'd have to deal with Ephram's weirdness when he had Colin again, but again he was wrong. Colin, not unlike Amy, insisted on hanging out with Ephram no matter what Bright did, and Bright watched as Ephram stole his best friend right out from under him.

It was more than enough to make him hate Ephram, and he did. He really, really did. He hated Ephram so much that he found himself stopping Colin from beating the shit out of him, found himself taking four punches to the face (oh, yeah, Colin's arm was definitely better) for the guy.

Sometimes, Bright really didn't get himself.

He had to admit that Ephram was an all-right guy after that. Ephram was the first one to stand up to Colin, and he didn't back down to Amy, either. He was even willing to go to the Spring Formal with Bright (not that they were, like, dates or anything). And Bright told himself that he was pissed on Ephram's behalf when Amy dragged him on to the dance floor, because she was so clearly just playing him to get back at Colin.

Stupid Amy. Her dress was ugly, anyway.

Bright sucked at lying to himself, he always had. It was a genetic defect or something—he just sucked at Denial. After the Spring Formal, when he spent an entire song glaring at Ephram and Amy over his own date's shoulder, he had to admit that maybe... maybe there was a reason Ephram was always getting into his life like this. Or, if he was honest with himself, maybe there was a reason that Bright was always *bringing* him into his life like this.

Bright spent that summer alternating between grieving for Colin and freaking out about his not-really-okay-maybe-kind-of-crush on Ephram Brown. Luckily, it was easy enough to avoid him, since as far as Bright could tell, Ephram spent that summer avoiding everyone — especially anyone who had been close to Colin Hart.

Bright wanted to tell Ephram that it was okay, that only idiots like his sister thought that his dad had killed Colin and Bright thought nothing of the sort, but that would mean talking to him. And Bright was afraid that if he talked to him, something incredibly stupid would fall out of his mouth, because something incredibly stupid always *did.*

So Bright managed to keep his sorta-kinda-definitely-there-crush to himself through to the fall. But then Amy in typical Amy fashion had to go and act up and do stupid shit and get herself into trouble again, and because Bright was her big brother he had to take care of her.

And okay, so he probably could have asked someone besides Ephram to help him, but none of the other dudes he knew would have kept their mouths shut and got his back as well as Ephram could. Besides, he knew that Ephram would want to help Amy, because Ephram was totally her bitch. It made sense for them to team up together to keep her from ruining her life.

Maybe he was getting the hang of this Denial thing, after all.

It wasn't that he was scared to make a move, he just — wasn't quite sure *how.* Guys were different from girls, and if you said to a guy,

‘Hey, you want to go do something?’ they didn’t usually think they were asking you out. And you couldn’t just say ‘Hey, you’re pretty, let’s make out!’ to a guy, and he *definitely* couldn’t say anything of the sort to Ephram.

Bright kept trying to figure out whether or not Ephram was gay, and failing miserably. On the one hand, Ephram used to have pink hair and he played piano and hated athletics and read weird comic books, all signs that most definitely pointed to him being a big fat homo; on the other hand, he spent *all* of his free time chasing after Amy, Laynie, and now that stupid babysitter. (And that so wasn’t fair. Sixteen-year-old guys *never* had actual chances with twenty-year-old babes. But of course Ephram had to go and break the rules there, too.) Bright didn’t know what to do.

Bright hated being wussy about shit. In his experience, it was better to just decide to something or not and then just do it — no pussyfooting around. Which meant that he needed to make a god damn decision about Ephram, and get on with his fucking *life* already. He didn’t want to act around Ephram the way *Ephram* acted around Amy, after all. Pining away like a loser was so not a good look for him.

But of course, like always, Amy had to go and screw everything up. *Why* did she have to decide to make a decision about Ephram at the exact same time that Bright did? And why did that decision have to be ‘I’m gonna go make out with him already’ instead of ‘I’m going to crawl into a hole and die and let Ephram get on with his life and go make out with Bright as he clearly needs to’?

And Bright might not like Amy much most of the time, but he was her Big Brother, after all. And Big Brothers just didn’t steal their sister’s boyfriends. It was totally bad Carma.

So he told her what she wanted to hear. He gave her damn good advice and told her to forget Colin and go after Ephram, and he absolutely did not tell her to stay away from Ephram because Ephram was *his,* dammit.

He kept hoping that in typical Amy fashion, she had ignored his advice and continued to pretend to be uninterested in Ephram, but apparently this was the one time in her life that she was being decisive, because a few days later they were dancing to slow romantic music at the reverend’s wedding and acting, for all the world to see, like they were going steady.

And they weren't rubbing his face in it, or anything. Really. That was just his imagination.

Suck it up, Bright tells himself sternly. You lost your chance, but Ephram is still your best friend and his little sister still wants you to dance with her. You're not allowed to go mope in your truck until the day is over.

As soon as they get back from the wedding, though, he locks himself in his room and throws himself on the bed and listens to Dashboard Confessional until he falls asleep. (No one knows that he secretly likes Dashboard and listens to them whenever he's feeling really crappy, and *no one ever will.*)

The next day, Ephram comes over while Bright's shooting hoops, like he always does. Bright pastes a smile on his face and ignores the fact that suddenly, not a single shot he makes is going in.

They talk about random shit for a while, just wasting air, and then Bright just — has to.

"So," he says casually. "I saw you dancing with my little sis last night."

Ephram snorts. "Yeah, I saw *you* dancing with *my* little sister, too. Is Dad going to have to get out the shotgun?"

"Dr. Brown doesn't have a shotgun."

"He could. You don't know."

"People from New York don't *have* shotguns."

"Maybe he's gone local."

"That's — look, whatever. My *point* is..." Bright tosses the ball between his hands, raising his eyebrows and smirking at Ephram. "You and Amy looked like you were getting pretty friendly last night."

Ephram scowls down at the grass, and Bright doesn't get it. He wouldn't be scowling if *he* was getting nookie, although he would if he was getting it from Amy and he's SO stopping that train of thought *right* there.

Ephram doesn't say anything, just stares down at the grass in that broody-angsty-artist way he has, and Bright has to prompt him by tossing the basketball at his head. "Dude."

Ephram tosses the basketball back. "Yeah. She was *real* friendly before she basically dumped my ass."

Bright blinks. "Huh?"

Ephram sighs like it's the worst fate in the world to put up with Bright's slowness. "We weren't doing anything romantic, Bright. She apologized for being a manipulative bitch and then told me to get on with my life."

"....wow." Amy is the best sister in the history of ever. Bright makes a note to do something really, really cool for her soon.

Ephram is looking at him strangely, and Bright remembers that he's supposed to be doing the whole Sympathetic Friend thing. "Sorry, man. I know you liked her, but Amy's a mess right now, you know?"

Ephram nods. "I'm actually... kind of relieved about it, actually. I mean —I was so hung up on her for the longest time..." he trails off and stares into the distance, like he's thinking about Big Important Things that Bright couldn't possibly understand.

Bright feels like jumping for joy when Ephram says that, not that he shows it. He leaves the basketball and sits down next to him. "So... now that Amy's out of the picture, what are you going to do?"

Ephram shrugs. "Madison was the only other possibility, and she doesn't want to become a statutory rapist." He smiles bitterly. "I don't have very good luck with the girls in this town."

Bright manages to stop himself from saying, "You'd have good luck with *me*" just in time.

He shrugs oh-so-nonchalantly instead. "Someone will come along, dude. Don't worry."

Ephram glances at him, but then looks back at his hands. "Yeah, maybe. Until then, hey, more material for angsty piano ballads, right?"

Bright nods, but his mind is a million miles away. This is *It.* This is his big opportunity. He's one-down, no time left on the clock, and he can win the game with one perfect shot.

Ephram starts babbling about manga and comics and how heartbreak is a great motivator, and Bright nods and agrees occasionally. Mostly, he's concentrating on formulating a plan to get Ephram to see that he

was chasing the wrong Abbott all along.

Bright can do this. He got Sissie Walden, the infamous anti-social loner, to go out with him when he was just a freshman, didn't he? Now that he's finally decided he's going to, wooing Ephram will be a piece of cake.

He hopes.

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Bright has to do this carefully, instead of just jumping in. Because he's never tried to seduce a guy before, and he's never tried to seduce his best friend, either. But he's going to do this, and he's going to do it right, because he's not sure that he's ever wanted *anything* more in his life. (Except for when he wanted Colin to wake up. But that didn't count, because he couldn't *do* anything about that.)

He starts small. He smiles more at Ephram, and wordlessly hands over his pudding every time they eat lunch together, and makes sure that he's playing basketball shirtless whenever Ephram comes over, even if it's a little chilly.

But after that... he's really kind of clueless. Ephram is smart, smart enough to notice if Bright gets too heavy-handed. And Bright isn't sure what would be worse: Ephram noticing too soon, before Bright has a chance to fully seduce him, and rejecting him outright; or Ephram remaining blissfully clueless forever and ever, until even kissing him isn't enough to make him realize what's going on.

And Ephram still spends *so* much damn time staring at his sister, even though she never stares back these days. Bright suspects that he also spends a horribly huge amount of time staring at his stupid *babysitter,* and he spends a lot of time himself wondering just what he can do to convince Andy to fire her.

Maybe *he* could offer to babysit. Delia likes him, right? And maybe Ephram just has a kink for baby-sitters.

Yeah. Right. And if you pull this finger, it plays Jingle Bells.

Bright tries not to spend too much time thinking crap like that. Psyching himself out or talking himself out of doing this isn't going to help anything. It isn't going to help him get Ephram.

So he doesn't spend too much time thinking about what might happen

when Ephram figures out what he's doing, or if Ephram rejects him. Instead, he comes over to the Browns' house when he knows Madison and Ephram will both be there, and drags Ephram up to his room and lets him talk at Bright about comics (oops, manga — he knows the difference now: comics are where the characters look normal, just drawn, and manga is where all the people have crazy bug eyes and no lips). Bright tells himself and Ephram that it's just wingman tactics, and feels a little guilty for the lie, but whatever—sometimes you have to use dirty tactics in war.

Not that this is a war—though maybe it is, because every time Bright comes over, Madison looks more and more interested in Ephram. 'Oh, Ephram, before you go can you help me and Delia finish up her school project? It'll only take a second.' 'Oh, you're hanging out with Bright today? I was hoping we could take your little sister to the park.' 'Oh come on Ephram, no need to rush off, we haven't really talked in days —how *are* you?' It was tough competition: Bright was not twenty years old, nor did he have long blonde hair or great breasts. And he was pretty sure that she knew what he was up to, too, considering the way he could feel her glare on him every time he walked upstairs with Ephram.

One day, he walks into Ephram's house (without knocking, as usual), and... Ephram isn't there. Delia is sitting at the kitchen counter, looking a little sad, and he grins and blows a kiss at her, which cheers her up slightly. He walks further into the house, about to yell for Ephram, and then he hears voices.

He can't hear the whole conversation; just snippets. Ephram is speaking in low, intense tones, by turns angry and pleading. Madison just sounds upset.

"....why do you keep lying to yourself?" Ephram's voice.

".... *not!*" Madison's.

"Oh, really." Then, silence. And the sounds of two bodies pressed up against each other.

Bright leaves without saying goodbye to Delia.

It takes him several good sulks to get over that, and he gets into a petty fight with Amy that night just because he has to yell at someone. But when he sees Ephram the next day at school, he looks even surlier than usual, and Bright catches him drawing vicious doodles of Madison with her head chopped off during math class, so he figures it

can’t have gone well.

One for the home team! Or Homo Team. Heh.

Later that night, Ephram calls him to come over to help him babysit Delia. When Bright asks why Madison isn’t there, Bright can almost hear Ephram’s jaw clenching over the phone. "Don’t. Ask." Bright is perfectly fine without asking. In fact, Bright is perfectly fine with coming over and overlooking Delia and every single one of her friends and even cleaning the entire Brown house if it means he’s taking Madison’s place.

Take that, Bitch! he crows in his head as he knocks on the Browns’ front door.

They watch Pocahontas with Delia, and Bright makes his usual quips about Pocahontas being totally hot for a cartoon, and Ephram rolls his eyes and makes his usual quips about this being totally historically inaccurate not to mention racist, and Delia tells them both to shut up during the songs and the parts with talking animals.

She falls asleep halfway through the movie, and Bright thinks about suggesting that they switch to another movie, but... nah. He likes this, him and Ephram sitting next to each other, and he doesn’t want either of them to get up and change the dvd.

Ephram starts yawning soon after his sister falls asleep, and then... and then Bright thinks that he’s having a wet dream or is fantasizing in the middle of history class or something, because Ephram actually *falls asleep on his shoulder.* That only happens in movies and in Bright’s head.

But he pinches his arm and it hurts, and this is real. Ephram’s head is snuggled up on Bright’s shoulder, and his breathing is sleep-heavy, and if Bright turned just a little bit he could kiss his forehead. If he turned just a little more, he could kiss his lips.

It’s tempting. Bright wonders if it would wake Ephram up. If this is the time to make his move.

But he doesn’t really think so. He likes this too much, just sitting here, feeling Ephram’s spiky hair poke his neck. (which, okay, that’s not nice but still it kind of is.) So instead he settles for gently getting his arm around Ephram and leaning back against him, closing his eyes himself.

He's still awake when Ephram stirs, but he pretends to be asleep. He can almost feel Ephram realizing what's happened, but Ephram doesn't... move right away. He stays there, snug against Bright, before moving and...

Looking at him. Bright can feel Ephram looking at him, studying him maybe, and he hopes that it's for some romantic reason and not that he has drool on his face or something.

Bright doesn't stir, and Ephram keeps staring, and then Ephram... sighs. And Bright feels his heart thump painfully in his chest.

That's... got to be a good sign right? After all, that didn't *sound* like an 'Ew, My best friend is so obviously in love with me, GOD how disgusting' sigh. Bright thinks (hopes) it sounded like a 'I am totally into my best friend, and because I am Ephram I am angsting about it' sigh.

Then an elbow nudges him painfully in the ribs, and Bright groans. "Wake up, doofus," Ephram says, and when Bright opens his eyes Ephram is smirking at him.

Bright scowls. "I was in a very happy place, there. I was dreaming about Jessica Alba naked. And you woke me *up.*"

"And thus the tragedy of your life continues." Ephram pats his leg, and it makes Bright's dick twitch. *Fucking* hormones.

Bright wants to stay on the couch, but Ephram stands up, stretching his back and exposing his midriff in the process. Bright doesn't stare. Much.

"Considering you're the big strong manly athlete, I nominate you most likely to carry Delia up to bed." Ephram smirks at him and walks off to the kitchen, leaving Bright to roll his eyes and haul the sleeping Delia up to her room. Thankfully, she doesn't wake up and demand a bedtime story or anything, and then Bright is back downstairs, in the Browns' kitchen.

With Ephram. Who is padding around the kitchen barefoot, bitching about the lack of decent food in the house, and Bright can't stop staring at his ass. His dick is still interested (just from a fucking *touch* on his *leg,* christ he's pathetic), and Bright needs to get home to his own bedroom so he can fix the situation, but.

He leans over the counter instead and grabs a cookie out of Ephram's

fingers, taking a bite.

Ephram is glaring at him like he'd just made lewd comments about his mom, Delia and his grandmother all at the same time. "I was going to eat that."

Bright grins at him. "Yeah. I know." He holds out the tiny part of the cookie that he didn't eat. "Want the rest?"

"You were a playground bully in elementary school, weren't you?" Ephram's lips curve in a smirk, and it makes Bright think about kissing him. Again.

He shrugs, and pops the rest of the cookie in his mouth. "Your loss."

Ephram grabs another cookie from the package and walks around the countertop-island. "So, this Madison thing."

Bright resists the urge to groan. Barely.

"I know we already tried the ignoring thing, but... what if I took it a step further? What if I made her think that *I* was hooking up with someone *else*?" Ephram raises his eyebrows at Bright. "What do you think. Dumbass pathetic plan, or a work of brilliance?"

"I think that would be really unfair to whoever you pretended to hook up with." Whoops. He didn't really mean to say that, even though it's true. He stares down at the countertop.

Ephram's eyebrows shoot up even higher, and his mouth falls open. "No way. You, the guy that told me that the best way to a girl's heart was to be a total asshole to her, are telling me that you think this plan might be *unfair* to the pawn?"

Bright glares. "It's no fun to be anyone's second choice. Which you know, considering your experience with it."

Okay, that was harsh, and Ephram's face immediately falls into a scowl. "That was different."

"Yeah. You kissing some other chick to make Madison look at you is *so* different from Amy dancing with you to piss off Colin."

Ephram looks away, his jaw clenching, and crosses his arms over his chest. "Fuck you."

Bright shrugs. He's learned by now that he can ignore Ephram's

outbursts. Mostly. He hopes that this is one of those times, and that he didn't just fuck everything up. "Just sayin'."

Minutes pass in silence, Ephram standing tense and angry and Bright eating cookies because he's nervous and doesn't know what to do with his hands. Bright is seconds away from waxing poetic about the sugary goodness of the stale cookies when Ephram finally speaks.

"Why do I do this? Why do I keep falling for girls that make me fucking masochistic?" He turns and glares at Bright, as if this is Bright's fault.

"Maybe it's because you're not supposed to be with *girls,*" Bright says. Reasonably, he feels.

Ephram just stares at him, then shakes his head. "Trying to have a reasonable conversation with you is like talking to the pandas at the zoo, I swear."

Bright is suddenly overwhelmingly, unreasonably angry. "Fine. Whatever. Go back to your plans of how to make yourself seem less pathetic to fucking *Madison.* I'm going home." He shoves the cookies away and stalks off, his hands twitching with the urge to hit something, preferably Ephram's face.

He can hear Ephram making vague, nonverbal protests behind him, but doesn't let himself look back.

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Ephram approaches him the next day at school, when Bright is at his locker. He looks nervous and abashed, and Bright feels slightly vindicated.

"So, um, about last night," Ephram begins, leaning against the locker next to Bright's.

Bright closes his own locker and turns to face him. "Yeah?"

"I have no idea what that fight was about, but can we make up anyway?" Ephram smiles at him, and Bright's knees go all jittery. "I mean, I don't even know what I did."

Bright grins back. "You were being an asshole, but I guess I can forgive you."

"How was I being an asshole?!" Ephram spreads his hands in protest. "I mean, okay, so I was being a little sexist, but I wasn't even being sexist against your gender! Because that would be my gender, too, so why would I do that?"

Bright rolls his eyes. "Dork."

"Yeah. So I've been told." It's as much of an apology as Bright needs.

Ephram grins and ducks his head, making his hair flop over his forehead. "So, um... Madison is back to babysitting Delia tonight."

And of fucking course the conversation goes back to being all about Madison. Bright represses a sigh.

"...but do you want to come over anyway?"

Part of Bright's mind is ecstatically insisting that this is a date, it has to be. Especially with the way Ephram is looking at him, his head still bowed and his lips slightly parted, a cautiously hopeful expression on his face. Bright knows that this isn't really a date date, but he allows himself to hope.

"Sure," he says, smiling. "Does that mean we can watch a real movie instead of cartoons? And by real movie," he adds as Ephram gets a mischievous glint in his eye, "I mean something in english with people I've heard of in it."

"Spoilsport," Ephram grumbles, but he doesn't look too pissed about it.

"So I'll see you tonight then. Eight thirty ish?"

Ephram shrugs. "Eight thirty, eight, nine, seven, whatever." He gives Bright a crooked smile. "Although if you show up at six thirty, you can save me from having to eat dinner alone with Madison and Delia."

Six thirty it is. Bright grins. "'Kay. I'll be there. Not like eating dinner with my family is a barrel of laughs these days, anyway."

Ephram gives him another one of those fucking gorgeous sexy smiles that make Bright wonder why the whole world isn't stopping what its doing just to stare. Then he's turning, and walking away, and Bright is still staring; he knows he must look like a mooning idiot, but he can't really bring himself to care.

It doesn't occur to him until later that he'd signed himself up to have

dinner with Madison, too.

And holy jesus, talk about awkward. Bright tries to be polite, he even attempts to *like* Madison, but she spends most of the dinner either a) ignoring him, or b) looking at him like he's a particularly odious slug that managed to make his way into her pristine house, or something.

And Ephram doesn't *help.* He spends most of the dinner talking loudly with Bright about fucking *anything* in a way that's very... not like how they are, and looking over at Madison and scowling every once in a while. And god, if looks could kill, Madison would be frying Bright to a crisp.

He has never been so happy for a meal to be over. He and Ephram escape to Ephram's bedroom, and as soon as the door is closed Bright whirls around to face him.

"You," he says, jabbing a finger at Ephram's chest. "Owe me *big time* for that."

Ephram just smirks. "I refuse to believe that you didn't *enjoy* pissing Madison off."

"Yeah, well, maybe I didn't really enjoy being used by my best friend to piss her off." The words are out before Bright can think about them, think about what they make him *look* like, and the smirky smile falls off Ephram's face in an instant.

"Hey, come on man, it wasn't really like that," He sounds so concerned and fucking sincere that it's pretty much impossible for Bright to stay mad at him for long.

"Whatever, just don't make me doing it again," Bright mutters, trying to put at least some half-hearted resentment into it.

Ephram smiles at him, slowly, and dammit Bright is *not* going to blush. "Well. Thanks. For, you know. Coming over."

Bright shrugs and tries to act casual, macho, manly, straight, all that stuff. "No problem, dude. It's not like I really mind hanging at your place." He's pretty sure he fails at all of the above.

The smile turns into a grin, and Ephram sits down on the bed. And Bright notices how low his jeans hang, and... dammit. Dammit dammit and also fuck.

Bright thinks that if he stays standing he's going to have a completely obvious hard-on in about five seconds, so he sits in Ephram's computer chair. "Um.... you said something about watching a real movie?"

"Oh, right," Ephram says. He gives Bright a sidelong look. "Have you ever seen Chasing Amy?"

"God dammit, Ephram, when I said a real movie I meant *not* a chick movie—"

"Hey, it's not like that, I swear!" Ephram protests. "There are lesbians?" he offers when Bright continues to glare at him.

The movie actually isn't that bad. There's dirty talk with the lesbians, which is great, and Bright kind of likes this Banky guy, though Ben Affleck's still a pussy. Ben Affleck is *always* a pussy, even when he's playing a supposedly bad-ass superhero.

And then — and then fucking Ben *kisses* the Banky dude, and Bright's jaw drops. Because... um. And fuck, everything he's thinking must be showing on his face, because Ephram is *looking* at him.

Looking at him like... like he did the other day, when he thought Bright was asleep, and Bright can feel himself going beet red.

"Sorry," Ephram says, his voice casual. "I forgot to warn you, things get a little weird at the end."

"No shit," Bright mutters. And christ, now they're talking about a *threesome,* and Bright's dick is going bad places, places where a threesome with Ephram and the blonde chick from the movie could actually happen. Bright pulls a leg up on the couch, attempting to hide it.

But Ephram isn't focusing on him anymore, he's staring at the screen, absorbed by the movie. Which Bright isn't really getting, because they're going from a threesome to yelling and crying, and okay, it's *always* cool when Ben Affleck gets bitchslapped, but Bright has pretty much given up on understanding what's actually going on.

Although he guesses it must be some heavy shit, because Ephram has that serious look on his face, and he's shaking his head. "God," he says. "That ending always just *gets* me. They're all so fucked-up,"

"Uh, I guess," Bright says. It's kind of hard for him to concentrate on

anything but his own hardening dick right now.

Ephram leans back on the couch, making his t-shirt ride up to expose a strip of pale skin between his jeans and his shirt. And maybe Bright does it out of nervousness, or maybe he's just tired of being hard around Ephram and being unable to do anything about it, or maybe whatever, but he doesn't even think about it — just leans over and brushes his hand across the exposed skin and up underneath Ephram's t-shirt.

Ephram jumps a little, and his head whips around, staring at Bright; Bright doesn't move his hand.

"Bright, what are you doing?" Ephram's speaking like he would to a very slow child, which Bright will take the time to be offended by *later.* Right now all he can think about is the way Ephram's pretty, girly lips are parted, and how Ephram hasn't moved away.

"I really want to kiss you," Bright blurts out, and this isn't going *anything* like any of the contingency plans Bright had worked out in his head, and he's probably making a giant fool of himself, but he can't stop stroking his thumb over Ephram's hipbone.

Ephram blinks. "Oh, you — you do? Oh, um — well, okay."

That's a good enough answer for Bright, and he leans in, pressing his lips against Ephram's mouth. And oh, christ, he's kissing *Ephram*, and that alone makes him moan, and then Ephram opens his mouth, letting Bright slip his tongue into his mouth, and Bright thinks he might come in his pants, just from kissing him and touching a little of his skin, and that would be really embarrassing.

Then Ephram pushes him away, and Bright panics. "What — what's wrong?"

Ephram smirks at him, and his lips are all red and bruised-looking from the kiss. Jesus. "Nothing. I just think that maybe we should move this upstairs, considering that my dad will be home at any minute."

Bright blinks. "Oh, right. Upstairs." He hadn't realized that one little word, 'upstairs,' could make his dick so incredibly happy.

He also hadn't realized how *long* it takes to get from Ephram's living room to his bedroom, and by the time Ephram shuts and locks the door behind him, it's all Bright can do to keep from jumping him and just, like, humping his leg or something until he gets off.

Instead, Ephram leans against the door, and Bright braces his hands on either side of Ephram's head, leaning in.

He gets to see Ephram's adam's apple bob when he swallows, up close and personal. "I didn't know you... felt like that," Ephram says, and Bright stares resolutely at Ephram's neck. If he looks up, he won't be able to *not* kiss Ephram.

"I do," Bright says simply, and Ephram makes this little sighing sound at that, and Bright can't help himself. He leans forward, kisses Ephram's neck, sucks on the skin.

He wants Ephram to have a hickey, the next time Madison or Amy sees him.

Ephram moans, and Bright can feel it against his mouth. Then Ephram paws at him, pulling him up, and this kiss is messy and sloppy and there are tongues everywhere and one of them is whimpering, and it's possibly the best kiss Bright's ever had. And then it definitely is, because without breaking the kiss, Ephram grabs the front of his shirt and shoves him over to the bed.

The bed. Whoa.

Bright leers when Ephram crawls on top of him, straddling his waist. He lets his hands slide down to Ephram's ass, cupping it and thrusting up. God, he's so hard now, and just rubbing up against Ephram feels like *everything,* when really they haven't even gotten their clothes off.

Ephram leans over, lying on top of him and grinding down, and Bright can feel Ephram's erection through his jeans, pushing against his thigh.

"Bright," Ephram says, like he's surprised to see him there.

"That's my name," Bright replies, grinning stupidly, and Ephram snorts, and kisses him.

Bright laughs into Ephram's mouth, and then the laugh turns into a moan, because Ephram has found a rhythm, grinding down as Bright grinds up. It's perfect, god, the friction, and Bright is probably squeezing his ass hard enough to hurt, but Ephram doesn't complain. It only takes a few thrusts before Bright muffles his gasps against Ephram's shoulder and comes in his pants.

"Christ," he pants against Ephram's t-shirt. Ephram makes a strangled noise and sits up, unbottoning his pants and shoving his hand down, but Bright knocks his arm away and rolls them over, pulling Ephram's pants down further and wrapping his hand around Ephram's cock.

Ephram whimpers and his face gets redder when he thrusts up into Bright's hand. Bright drags his mouth across Ephram's cheek and lips, and damn, sometime he has to devote, like, an entire *day* just to tasting Ephram everywhere. Right now he's okay with just sucking on a spot underneath his jaw and jerking him off.

He can feel Ephram's cock getting slicker and slicker, encouraging him to go faster, and the movement of Ephram's hips is just — god, the sexiest thing ever. Except, no, Ephram coming in Bright's hand is the sexiest thing ever, because he throws his head back and makes a sound deep in his throat and his whole skinny little body tenses, and then there's wet semen on Bright's hand.

Bright swallows, and sits back on his heels. He has no real clue what to do now; all of his fantasies got to them both coming and then stopped—there was no afterwards. He doesn't think Ephram really knows what to do, either; he's staring at Bright with this half-confused, half-stunned look on his face. It makes Bright really want to be naked, and not just because he really needs to change his underwear.

Then Ephram sits up and smiles, though it doesn't—it's not one of his *real* smiles, Bright can tell. He kisses Bright, and it's a nice kiss, but when Bright starts to kiss back in earnest he pulls away.

"It's getting late," he says. "Schoolnight, and all that."

Bright nods. "Right. My parents are probably ten minutes away from sending out a search party."

Ephram nods and hands Bright some tissues to clean himself up. "So I guess I'll just... see you tomorrow at school, then."

His voice is neutral and calm and almost robotic, and it kind of makes Bright nervous. They *did* just have sex, right? That wasn't Bright's imagination?

"Yeah, sure, see you at school," Bright echoes, standing up. The wet spot is obvious on the front of his jeans, and he tries to cover it up as best he can with his shirt and jacket.

"Right, school." Ephram gives him the smallest of smiles before looking away again, and Bright realizes he's being crowded out the door. He opens his mouth to protest, but one look at the tight line of Ephram's mouth and he decides against it.

He gets inside his car and just sits, staring at Ephram's house. Okay, so... that wasn't at all how he'd imagined his first time with Ephram. But it was *sex* with *Ephram* and now at least Bright knows that Ephram reciprocates, right? Even if things were awkward and he has no idea what Ephram is thinking and he's terrified that Ephram's going to back out.

After a while he decides that if he stays there any longer it's just going to get stalker-creepy, and starts the car, heading home.

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He wakes up the next day unsure of how to feel. He really, really wants to see Ephram as soon as possible, which means for once he's actually excited about school for once, but he's also really, really nervous that Ephram will have decided that this is a bad idea. Which would be stupid, because it *isn't,* it's the best damn idea Bright has ever had.

So it just figures that Ephram isn't at school. Bright looks all over for him at lunch, he even campst out by Ephram's locker after school, but Ephram doesn't show. Which really kind of sucks, because Bright wants to make sure things are okay and also go back to the sex. So he drives to Ephram's house after school, and no one answers the doorbell, but it's unlocked and Bright has the distinct feeling that *someone* is home, so he comes in anyway.

He hears music in Ephram's room, and when he knocks on the door, Ephram yanks it open immediately, looking at first irritated, then surprised and a little guilty.

"Hey," Bright says, trying to seem casual. "You weren't at school today."

"Yeah, I was sick," Ephram says. When Bright looks skeptical, he gives a fake little cough.

"Uh, okay," Bright says. "You faked sick just to avoid me?" He thinks maybe he should be a little flattered.

Ephram cringes. "Well, you and a history test. Do you, um, do you

want to come in?"

"Sure," Bright says, walking in and sitting on Ephram's bed. They stay like that for a while, Ephram standing awkwardly and Bright sitting. Bright keeps waiting for Ephram to say something, maybe apologize, but he doesn't, so Bright speaks.

"So I guess we should probably talk about what happened last night," he says in a rush. *He* doesn't want to talk about it, he just wants to do it again, but Ephram seems like the talking kind of guy.

Ephram sighs and sits down next to him. "It was a bad idea," he says grimly, and Bright wants to throttle him.

"Are you shitting me?" he says loudly, hoping to get through to Ephram. "How was it a bad idea?"

Ephram snorts. "You mean aside from the fact that we're two *guys* in a small conservative town in Colorado? You're the brother of a girl who I was in love with until just recently. We're best friends, and if this doesn't work out we won't be anymore. We have nothing in common. I'm a horrible person to date, I get upset and insecure about little things, I-"

"Shut up, Ephram," Bright says, annoyed, and kisses him. Ephram's lips keep moving against his, trying to protest, but Bright is stronger than him and doesn't let him pull away.

"Look," he says, when he has to pull away to breathe. "I've had this huge crush on you for, like, ever, and we totally had sex and it was really good and I'm not going to let you fuck that up by being a drama queen, okay?"

Ephram looks a little stunned, but he shakes his head. "Bright, I—look. I just don't think I'm ready for—for something like this. I'd fuck it up."

Bright looks down at his shoes. "'I don't think I'm ready for this' is the line you give someone that you don't really want to hook up with. Everyone knows that."

"Oh man, no, it's not that I don't *want* to, because last night was—yeah, wow." Bright looks up at that, and Ephram looks back at him nervously. "I just—I'll screw this up. I always do."

Bright shakes his head. "You're still being an idiot drama queen. I don't *care,* okay?" He kisses Ephram again, and this time Ephram

doesn’t protest, just makes a soft noise against Bright’s mouth and kisses back.

Bright likes kissing Ephram, likes it a lot. It’s not like kissing other people, it’s not slimy or gross and Ephram never tries to shove his tongue preemptively down Bright’s throat. He could really get used to this, to kissing Ephram all the time, and the thought makes him a little giddy.

Ephram pulls him back down onto the bed and Bright lies next to him. They kiss for a long time, until Bright’s lips start feeling funny, and then they just lie there, Bright resting his arm a little possessively on Ephram’s hip and lying back on the pillow.

It’s nice, just like this. They can have sex later, but right now it’s just nice, lying here, with Ephram’s exhalations tickling Bright’s neck.

"I still think this is a bad idea," Ephram mutters against Bright’s collarbone, sounding sleepy. Bright just grins and squeezes him, and even though he can’t see it, he knows Ephram is smiling.

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